

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Mapp Signs Minimum Wage Increase Bill Into Law

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has signed into law the minimum wage increase bill sponsored by Senator Jean Forde, an action that is sure to elicit praise from residents, especially those who are currently earning the minimum wage of \$7.25, as their hourly wages will climb to \$8.35.

According to the bill, the first increase will go into effect "one month after the first day of the quarter following the enactment of this legislation," which is June, as the second quarter of the year begins in April.

After this year's increase, another increase of \$9.50 will take effect on January 1, 2017, and another increase to \$10.50 on January 1, 2018 — so as to not shock businesses set

to absorb the added cost.

"This is a good bill for the territory and it is consistent with my administration's efforts to increase pay to public employees," Governor Mapp said. "I sincerely commend the sponsors of this legislation." The bill additionally increases the base wage of tipped service workers from 30 percent to 40 percent of the minimum wage.

"This is a tremendous victory for working people, as the plain fact is that the minimum wage of \$7.25 is simply not enough to live on," said Mr. Forde. "It is heartbreaking to see people going out and working hard every day, only to find that their paychecks cannot meet even their most basic needs."

Mr. Forde said the bill was a long time in the making, as he submitted a drafting request on the first day of the 31st Legislature. "From day one, I have been committed to struggling on behalf of working people, and I understand that increasing the minimum wage will improve the quality of life for thousands of workers and provide a boost to the economy, as they will have more money to spend with local businesses," Mr. Forde said.

He added: "This measure is based on solid analysis. In fact, a study just released by the Bureau of Economic Research states that this minimum wage bill will stimulate the creation of additional jobs in the economy. Additionally, I spoke with representatives of both labor and businesses, particularly small businesses, to ensure that the needs of all were taken into account."

The Governor also approved a measure to require more stringent reporting from the administration on federal grants. He called the bill a "well-intentioned effort to implement accountability" and said it would improve information-sharing regarding actual funding available for government programs and services.

In the letter to Senate President Neville James, Governor Mapp described a measure to reduce hotel room requirements ostensibly for [a Christiansted casino](#) as "unfair to the community". The governor line-item-vetoed the section of Bill No. 31-0114 that would change the rules for obtaining a casino license by giving the Casino Control Commission the authority to waive mandated requirements in regard to hotel rooms.

"Following current law, the owner of the gaming establishment would then make a real investment in our economy - construction jobs, painters, masons, electricians, purchasing building materials, etc. before extracting dollars from gambling patrons," wrote the governor. "Let the owner of the hotel complete the necessary investments in order to open the doors of the casino. To do otherwise is to have the gambling patrons build the rooms and spaces... Moreover, the section does not provide any criteria or guidance on how the Casino Control Commission would evaluate a request for such a waiver, and it leaves unfettered discretion to the Casino Control Commission members..."

Among other bills approved this week were measures to establish a blood donation program, making wearing body armor while committing certain crimes a felony, prohibiting dashboard display of licenses plates and increasing the threshold for grand larceny to \$500.

**Correction:** March 25, 2016

*A previous version of this story stated that the new law would go into effect in May, however the correct month is June -- 90 days from now. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.*

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